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17 April 1947

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, R & E

Subject: Authority and Responsibility of the Intelligence Staff and the Branches

1. There has been some confusion with respect to the subject ever since the Chief, Intelligence Staff, ceased to be also Acting Assistant Director or Acting Deputy Assistant Director. In my opinion, various attempts to clarify the subject in discussion have failed because of a too-glib use of the terms "editorial" and "substantive" with insufficient consideration of their meaning and application in the context -- i.e., without definition of terms. I believe that a candid discussion of the subject, with proper definition of terms, would reveal:

a. That the attempt to distinguish between "editorial" and "substantive" functions is illusory and misleading.

b. That both editorial and substantive functions are inherent in the responsibilities of both the staff and the Branches; consequently, that the terms are useless in attempting to distinguish between their responsibilities.

c. That the responsibilities of the Staff and the Branches, respectively, can be agreeably defined in other terms; consequently, that no real policy difference exists among us.

2. Consider the argument that the authority of the Staff should be "editorial" only, that of the Branches only "substantive." This proposition appears, on superficial consideration, to have the beauty of clarity and simplicity. Actually it is a shallow and misleading over-simplification.

Does it mean that the Branches, while exercising exclusive "substantive" authority, have no responsibility to produce intelligible copy? How are the Branches to express "substantive" judgment without the intelligible use of language? If they consider their "substantive" responsibility discharged in producing drafts so obscure that extensive "editorial" revision is necessary, they run grave risk of "substantive" alteration of their copy in the course of the "editorial" process. Obviously it behooves the Branches to produce copy as clear, concise, and meaningful as they are able to make it, from an "editorial" as well as a "substantive" point of view.

Does it mean that the Intelligence Staff, while exercising exclusive "editorial" authority, has no responsibility with respect to meaning? What purpose has "editorial" review unrelated to meaning? - and the meaning of the words is the "substance" of the report. Does "editorial" review include consideration of such matters as pertinence, logic in presentation, completeness of coverage, coherence, and intelligibility? Judgment on these matters is "substantive" judgment in my understanding of the term. It is also an exercise of "editorial" judgment, in the broader sense of that term.

Given that we are normally working against a deadline in our current publications and past it with respect to others, prompt decisions are required. Who will decide whether a particular alteration is "editorial" or "substantive"?

Manifestly the proposition under consideration would establish anarchy in the name of order. To state it is to present the reductio ad absurdum.

3. The Intelligence Staff not only recognizes, but must insist upon, both editorial and substantive responsibility in the Branches. It has no use for incoherent copy, however important its conjectural substance. It must rely upon the Branches to be better informed than it with respect to particular situations, inasmuch as (a) Branch personnel are selected as specialists in their particular fields, and (b) their responsibilities are limited to those fields and they can obviously cover them much more closely than can personnel having generalized responsibilities.

4. The Branches must recognize equally that the personnel of the Intelligence Staff were selected for a different, but definite, sort of competence not limited to the transposition of phrases or the insertion of commas. It is expressly a competence, based on experience, to exercise judgment as to pertinence, logic in presentation, completeness of coverage, coherence, and intelligibility, summed up in responsibility for decision whether and what to publish. This responsibility, and the authority which must accompany it, are distinguishable from the authority and responsibility of a specialist in a particular subject, but not in terms of a distinction between "editorial" and "substantive" functions.

5. The functional chart attempts to make this distinction by charging the Branches with the preparation of reports and estimates and charging the Staff with coordination and supervision of that activity. Manifestly, the effective accomplishment of the ORE mission depends upon close collaboration between the Staff and Branches. The Staff could accomplish nothing of itself in a vacuum.

The Branches also, however competent in their respective fields, are necessarily limited to those fields in their view and not in a position to take responsibility for decisions requiring an overall view. This distinction between particular and overall responsibility (and corresponding authority) is the proper approach to a distinction between the functions of the Staff and the Branches. The matter can be summed up in our understanding that the Intelligence Staff is the agent or deputy of the Assistant Director (is the Assistant Director) for the limited purpose indicated and subject to reference to the Assistant Director of any disagreement requiring a command decision.

6. I request that this matter be considered at your meeting with the Branch Chiefs and others on Friday, 25 April.

*No. eventually
taken up in intra-Branch
chief meeting Monday, Apr. 24.*

LUDWELL L. MONTAGUE
Chief, Intelligence Staff, ORE

cc Chief, Planning Staff
Branch Chiefs
Intelligence Staff